

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A method of preparing flat articles for sorting, comprising:
receiving a bundle of flat items to be sorted, the bundle being wrapped with a flexible film such that the film forms an enclosed package of flat items;
placing one of the bundles on a substantially horizontal work surface;
manually moving the bundle adjacent at least one automated film slitter which is mounted along one side of the horizontal work surface, the film slitter being automatically activated when the bundle is moved adjacent the film slitter on the work surface;
removing the cut film from the flat items; and
stacking the unbundled flat items in a cartridge.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the bundle is packaged using flexible straps, the method further comprising manually removing the straps with a retractable clipper mounted adjacent the work surface.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein a first film slitter is positioned at 90° relative to a second film slitter and wherein the method further comprises simultaneously cutting the film on at least two sides of the bundle, which sides are oriented at 90° relative to each other.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1 wherein the film slitter is a hot air slitter, the method comprising using heated air to cut the film ~~from the bundle~~.

5. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the substantially horizontal work surface is a substantially frictionless surface.

6. (Original) The method of claim 1 wherein the cartridge is supported in a self-adjusting lift, the lift adjusting the elevation of the cartridge such that the top of the stack of flat items is maintained adjacent the work surface.

7-20. (canceled)

21. (New) The method of claim 1, wherein the flat items are mail pieces.

22. (New) A method of preparing flat articles for sorting, comprising:

receiving a bundle of flat items to be sorted into a holding bin which is elevated relative a work table proximate the holding bin, the bundle being wrapped with a flexible film such that the film forms an enclosed package of stacked flat items;

sliding the wrapped bundle along a chute from the holding bin to a horizontal work surface which comprises a top surface of the work table;

manually moving the wrapped bundle adjacent at least one automated film slitter which is mounted along one side of the horizontal work surface, the film slitter being automatically activated when the bundle is moved adjacent the film slitter on the work surface;

repeating the manual moving step as needed to slit the film along four sides of the bundle;

then manually removing the cut film from the flat items; and

then manually stacking the unbundled flat items in a cartridge positioned in proximity to the work surface.

23. (New) The method of claim 22, wherein the flat items comprise mail pieces, further comprising edging the mail pieces against side and bottom walls of the cartridge.

24. (New) The method of claim 22, further comprising transferring a cartridge full of mail to a cart.

25. (New) The method of claim 22, wherein a first automatic film slitter is positioned at 90.degrees relative to a second automatic film slitter, wherein the method further comprises simultaneously cutting the film on at least two sides of the bundle using the first and second slitters by manually positioning the bundle against the slitters so that the slitters are actuated.

26. (New) The method of claim 22, wherein the film slitter is a hot air slitter, the method comprising using heated air to cut the film along four sides of the bundle.

27. (New) The method of claim 22, wherein the substantially horizontal work surface is a substantially frictionless surface provided with ball bearings..

28. (New) The method of claim 22, wherein the cartridge is supported in a self-adjusting lift, the lift adjusting the elevation of the cartridge such that the top of the stack of flat items is maintained adjacent the work surface.